

Violence and Reform in American History

ISSN 0003-4827

Copyright © 1980 State Historical Society of Iowa. This article is posted here for personal use, not for redistribution.

Recommended Citation

"Violence and Reform in American History." *The Annals of Iowa* 45 (1980), 430-431.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.8725>

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](#)

THE ANNALS OF IOWA

Violence and Reform in American History, by Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones. New York: New Viewpoints, 1978. pp. ix, 242. Appendix (Enumeration of Deaths in 75 Strikes, 1890-1909), notes, a guide to further reading, index. \$12.50.

Violence in American history has become a subject of some interest and study in recent years. Professor Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, recipient of a Ph.D. from the University of Cambridge, and presently lecturer in history at the University of Edinburgh, has added an interesting if mis-titled contribution to the field.

The heart of the work is the section on what Jeffreys-Jones calls "a rhetoric of violence" (p. 6), especially concerning industry and labor relations in the Progressive Era. Chapters on the rise and decline of the role and use of armed guards and labor spies are clear and concise, and add interesting information and insights to our knowledge of the early twentieth century. Considerable space is also devoted to what he calls a National Dynamite Conspiracy of 1905-1911 and a careful discussion of Samuel Gompers' awareness of and involvement in this conspiracy. In these areas he is on firm ground, and adept at summary and analysis.

However, in the chapters which precede and follow the above-mentioned sections there is too much simplistic summarizing, inadequate analysis, and insufficient documentation. Sweeping generalizations have no footnotes; long periods of time and numerous incidents are reduced to a paragraph or two. Also, there seems to be a tendency to leap from the Progressive Era to the New Deal, to the 1960s, and back to the early twentieth century without any clear transition or connection.

Professor Jeffreys-Jones does not seem to have consulted the Theodore Roosevelt Papers, the Woodrow Wilson Papers, or works such as Robert Murray's *The Red Scare*, or the volumes of Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. and Frank Freidel on the New Deal. Also, there are occasions when the age-old admonition to "go to the original source whenever possible" has not been followed. For example, the author refers to an investigation of labor-management relations between 1883 and 1885 by the Senate Committee on Education and Labor, and does not cite the original hearings but a 1966 work by William Appleman Williams.

Jeffreys-Jones concludes that "rhetorical violence does not pay" and that the Progressive movement and the New Frontier-Great Society reform efforts failed, whereas the New Deal did not use such violence and was "the twentieth century's most successful reform movement"

Book Reviews

(p. 177). As he himself notes, the latter two points, especially the effectiveness of the New Deal, have already been challenged.

The author has some interesting things to say, especially about the Progressive Era, and says them well, but the title is inaccurate and the work should either be shortened and used as an essay or article in a professional journal or extended with more evidence and a more thorough, fuller analysis while still concentrating on the early twentieth century. Works such as H. D. Graham and T. R. Gurr (eds.) *The History of Violence in America* (N.Y. 1969) and R. M. Brown's *Strain of Violence: Historical Studies of American Violence and Vigilantism* (N.Y.: 1975), cited in the guide to additional reading, are useful for the broader perspective though Jeffreys-Jones does seek to connect violence and reform as these works do not, and he concentrates on the Progressive movement while the broader works skim or ignore it.

Paul L. Silver
Johnson State College
Johnson, VT

The National Archives: America's Ministry of Documents, 1934-1968, by Donald R. McCoy. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1978. pp. ix, 437. Photographs, notes, bibliography, index. \$19.00.

Anyone who has experienced the rewards and frustrations of research in federal documents should appreciate this first comprehensive account of the National Archives from its establishment in 1934 through 1968. Historian Donald R. McCoy, University of Kansas, has produced a model administrative study of an important national agency. He balanced the important factors of chronology and topics, personnel and operations, and the rivalry-politics from within the bureaucracy.

McCoy delved cogently but selectively into the establishment of the Archives and the important precedent set by President Franklin D.

Copyright of *Annals of Iowa* is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.